

Learning About Healthy Eating for Teens



What is healthy eating?

Healthy eating means eating a variety of foods so that you get all the nutrients you need. Your body needs protein, carbohydrate, and fats for energy. They keep your heart beating, your brain active, and your muscles working.

Eating a well-balanced diet will help you feel your best and give you plenty of energy for school, work, sports, or play. And it will help you reach and stay at a healthy weight.

Along with giving you nutrients and energy, healthy foods also can give you pleasure. They can taste great and be good for you at the same time.

How do you get started on healthy eating?

Healthy eating starts with learning new ways to eat, such as adding more fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and cutting back on foods that have a lot of fat, salt, and sugar.

You may be surprised at how easy it can be to eat healthy foods and how good it will make you feel. Healthy eating is not a diet. It means making changes you can live with and enjoy for the rest of your life.

Healthy eating is about balance, variety, and moderation.

Aim for balance

Having a well-balanced diet means that you eat enough, but not too much, and that food gives you the nutrients you need to stay healthy. So listen to your body. Eat when you're hungry. Stop when you feel satisfied.

On most days, try to eat from each food group. This means eating a variety of:

- Whole grains, such as whole wheat breads and pastas.
- Fruits and vegetables.
- Dairy products, such as low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Lean proteins, such as all types of fish, chicken without the skin, and beans.

Look for variety

Be adventurous. Choose different foods in each food group. For example, don't reach for an apple every time you choose a fruit. Eating a variety of foods each day will help you get all the nutrients you need.

Practice moderation

Don't have too much or too little of one thing. All foods, if eaten in moderation, can be part of healthy eating. Even sweets can be okay.

If your favorite foods are high in fat, salt, sugar, or calories, limit how often you eat them. Eat smaller servings, or look for healthy substitutes.

How do you make healthy eating a habit?

It can be hard to make healthy eating a habit, especially when fast food, vending-machine snacks, and processed foods are so easy to find. But it may be easier than you think.

Think about some small changes you can make. You don't have to change everything at once.

Here are some simple things you can do to get more of the healthy foods you need in your diet.

- Use whole wheat bread instead of white bread.
- Use fat-free or low-fat milk instead of whole milk.
- Eat brown rice instead of white rice, and eat whole wheat pasta instead of white-flour pasta.
- Try low-fat cheeses and low-fat yogurt.
- Add more fruits and vegetables to meals, and have them for snacks.
- Add lettuce, tomato, cucumber, and onion to sandwiches.
- Add fruit to yogurt and cereal.

You can also make healthy choices when eating out, even at fast-food restaurants. When eating out, try:

- A veggie pizza with a whole wheat crust or with grilled chicken instead of sausage or pepperoni.
- Pasta with roasted vegetables, grilled chicken, or marinara sauce instead of cream sauce.
- A vegetable wrap or grilled chicken wrap.
- A side salad instead of fries.

It's also a good idea to have healthy snacks ready for when you get hungry. Keep healthy snacks with you at school or work, in your car, and at home. If you have a healthy snack easily available, you'll be less likely to pick a candy bar or bag of chips from a vending machine instead.

Some healthy snacks you might want to keep on hand are fruit, low-fat yogurt, string cheese, low-fat microwave popcorn, raisins and other dried fruit, nuts, whole wheat crackers, pretzels, carrots, celery sticks, and broccoli.

Care instructions adapted under license by Compassion Services LLC. This care instruction is for use with your licensed healthcare professional. If you have questions about a medical condition or this instruction, always ask your healthcare professional. Healthwise, Incorporated disclaims any warranty or liability for your use of this information.